

Inhibited sexual desire

Department of Medical Psychology

If you need help to understand this leaflet or would like it in a different language or format such as large print, Braille or audio, please ask a member of staff.

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What is inhibited sexual desire?

- Inhibited sexual desire (ISD) is a medical condition with only one symptom: low sexual desire.
- Sexual desire changes over the course of our lives, and occasional loss of desire is not uncommon.
- If both partners have low sexual desire, the issue of sexual interest level may not be a problem within the relationship.
- If there is a persistent loss of desire which causes distress, this is ISD.
- ISD is characterised by decreased sexual activity, few or no sexual dreams or fantasies, and sometimes loss of sexual attraction.
- ISD can be a primary or a secondary condition. This is an important distinction for treatment purposes. It's a primary condition if the person with ISD has never had sexual desire.
- It's a secondary condition if the person with ISD began a relationship with normal sexual desire, but later became disinterested.

What causes ISD?

Inhibited sexual desire is very common and the cause may be physical, psychological, or both.

Physical causes

Physical illnesses and some medications may contribute to a lack of sexual desire, particularly when they produce fatigue, or general feelings of malaise.

• **Sexual problems**

A low sex drive could be the result of a physical issue that makes sex unfulfilling or difficult, for example:

- erectile dysfunction
- vaginal dryness
- painful sex/vaginismus
- ejaculation problems

• **Menopause**

Hormonal changes during menopause can result in decreased sexual desire.

• **Pregnancy**

Lack of sexual desire is common during pregnancy, after giving birth and while breastfeeding. This can be due to:

- hormone changes
- changes to your body and issues with body image
- exhaustion
- painful sex caused by an injury during childbirth
- changed priorities, e.g. focus now on looking after your baby.

Psychological causes

• Relationship problems

ISD is most frequently caused by relationship problems wherein one partner does not feel emotionally intimate or close to the other. A low libido can be the result of:

- unresolved conflict and frequent arguments
- fears of rejection, failure, criticism, feelings of embarrassment, performance anxiety and body image concerns
- poor communication
- difficulty trusting each other.

• Stress, anxiety and exhaustion

- If you are constantly tired, stressed or anxious, this can have an impact on sexual desire.

• Depression

- Depression can interfere with all aspects of your life, including your sex life.
- It's important to see your GP if you think you might be depressed. They can advise you about the main treatments for depression, such as talking therapies or antidepressants.

What can I do about ISD?

Relationship

- When one partner in a relationship is significantly less interested in sex than the other, and this has become a source of distress, it is recommended the couple address this as a priority.
- One good way to tackle ISD is to reserve time for non-sexual intimacy with your partner. Couples who reserve time to talk each week, and regular time alone are more likely to be able to maintain a closer relationship and feel sexual interest.
- Open and honest communication with your partner can enhance your emotional and sexual intimacy. Learning to talk about your likes and dislikes, and providing feedback in a non-threatening manner can set the stage for greater sexual intimacy.
- Regularly reserving time before exhaustion sets in, for both talking and sexual intimacy will encourage closeness and sexual desire.
- For some individuals, reading novels or watching films with romantic or sexual content may also encourage sexual desire.

Lifestyle

- Avoiding drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, stopping smoking, and exercising regularly are all as important to your sexual health as for your overall health.
- Both alcohol and tobacco can lower your sexual responsiveness.

- Regular aerobic exercise can increase your stamina, improve your body image, improve your mood and libido.
- Manage stress. Learning relaxation can enhance your ability to focus on the sexual experience and improve your arousal.

Treatments for ISD

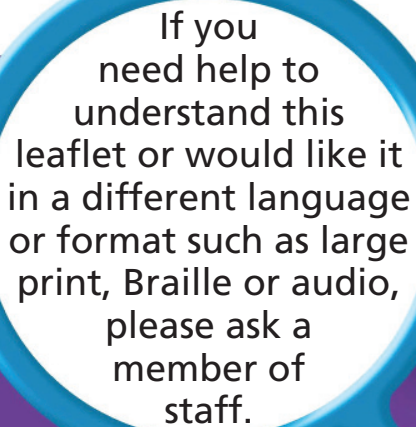
Treatments will vary according to the factors that are inhibiting sexual interest.

Treatments for physical causes of ISD

- Adjusting or changing medications that have sexual side effects
- Treating thyroid problems or other hormonal conditions
- Strengthening pelvic floor muscles
- Learning pain management strategies to help with pelvic pain or other pain problems
- As testosterone is the hormone responsible for creating sexual desire in men and women, your doctor may decide it would be useful to check your testosterone level.

Treatments for Psychological Causes of ISD

- Psychological therapy can support individuals or couples in making positive changes within their relationship
- Communication training can assist couples by learning to:
 - talk on a feelings level
 - show empathy
 - resolve differences in a sensitive manner
 - express anger constructively
 - reserve time for couple activities, affection and talking.
- A psychosexual therapist can also help you focus directly on your sexual relationship, and support you in expanding the variety and time devoted to sexual activity and ways to enhance intimacy with your partner.



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